



# FACTSHEET 12

## Volunteer Policies

This factsheet is one of 2 in this series on working with volunteers and should be read in conjunction with **Factsheet 13: Managing Volunteers**.

The involvement of volunteers in any organisation can be a fruitful and rewarding experience for both the volunteers and for the organisation. However if the involvement of volunteers in your organisation is not given enough thought and care then it can also become a source of difficulty. Below and on the related fact sheet are some tips and ideas about how to successfully involve volunteers in your organisation.

### 1: Developing a Volunteer Policy

Before recruiting new volunteers you should think carefully about what they will be doing, how they will be supported, supervised and managed and what will help to keep volunteers motivated. The process of producing a Volunteer Policy, volunteer task descriptions and agreements, should ensure the roles of volunteers are clearly defined.

A Volunteer Policy is the foundation on which your organisation's involvement with volunteers should be based. It forms the basis of your entire volunteer programme, giving cohesion and consistency to all elements in your organisation that affects volunteers (i.e. recruitment, expenses, health & safety etc.) Volunteer Policies are the key to involving diversity, because they help to define the role of volunteers within the organisation, and how they can expect to be treated.

Your volunteer policy can be a relatively short and simple document, using clear language which should be made available to everyone in the organisation. The policy should include statements on some or all of the following topics:

- **Organisation's position on involving volunteers**  
Relationships to paid staff etc.
- **Equal opportunities**  
Does the organisation's policy include volunteers? All staff and volunteers should be treated in line with the Equal Opportunities Policy.
- **The Role of Volunteers**  
Where volunteers fit into the structure of the organisation
- **Expectations, Responsibilities and Opportunities**  
What is expected of volunteers and what their responsibilities would be, also the range of opportunities available to volunteers.
- **Recruitment and selection**  
How will volunteers be recruited, will there be application forms, interviews and a probationary period?
- **Volunteer task descriptions**  
All volunteers should be given clear guidelines and task descriptions detailing their roles and responsibilities.
- **Confidentiality**  
Do volunteers have the same responsibilities for confidentiality as paid staff?
- **Induction and Training**  
Volunteers should receive an individual induction programme, to familiarise themselves with the organisation and ongoing training as required
- **Expenses**  
Volunteers would normally receive their travel and lunch expenses where appropriate.
- **Insurance**  
Are volunteers covered? It is important to ensure that volunteers are insured whilst they are volunteering. For more information see the information sheet 'Insurance'.

# Volunteer Policies

- **Health and safety**

Volunteers should be made aware that they are included in the Health and Safety Policy.

- **Supervision and support**

Who will be responsible for this and what form it will take?

- **Grievance and disciplinary procedures**

What systems are in place that cover volunteers? It is good practice to have clear, written guidelines on what will happen when problems arise, but it might be useful to develop procedures specifically for volunteers that are less formal than for paid workers.

- **Encourage volunteers to participate in your organisation's decision making processes.**

This ensures democracy and participation and can help to keep volunteers feel motivated and involved in the organisation.

## 2: Task Descriptions

It is a good idea for volunteers to have specific roles rather than taking on volunteers to help out within the organisation in general. Without defined roles volunteers can lack direction, or be given jobs that no one else wants to do. This could quickly lead to overload, de-motivation and ultimately to losing volunteers.

A volunteer task description is similar to a job description, in that it outlines what tasks a volunteer will perform and what skills and experience are needed, but it can be relatively simple and less formal.

This helps to give volunteers and everyone else in the organisation a clear idea of what is expected. A simple task description should include:

- The tasks involved
- Who the volunteer is responsible to
- Skills and experience required
- Location

## 3: Volunteer Agreements

Organisations are understandably aware of the dangers of creating a contract with their volunteers, and can be reluctant to have any form of written agreement with them. However, as long as the organisation avoids any form of obligation or contractual language any risk is outweighed by the benefits of having a written agreement.

Agreements set out the organisation's commitment to its volunteers, and what it can expect from its volunteers. They act as a reference point for the volunteers, and a reminder to the organisation that it should meet the standards of good practice that it

has set itself. A typical agreement might state that the organisation will pay volunteer expenses, provide adequate training and supervision, carry out adequate risk assessments, and treat volunteers in accordance with its equal opportunities policy. Volunteers would agree to follow the rules and procedures of the organisation, and meet time commitments, giving adequate notice if this is not possible.

Having written volunteer policies and agreements does not create contracts of employment. In fact, a volunteer policy helps to clarify the unique contribution volunteers make to an organisation and shows how this is distinct to that of paid workers. In order to be certain of not creating a legal contract with volunteers here are a few simple measures that can be taken when creating formal documents:

- Nature and purpose of the voluntary work
- Hours and days on which the volunteer has agreed to be available to do the work
- Name and position of the person who will supervise the volunteer or to whom the volunteer is responsible
- What the volunteer is expected to do
- The volunteer's agreement to abide by the organisation's objectives, its equal opportunities policy, its health and safety policy, and other rules
- Internal meetings, external meetings or other events the volunteer is entitled to or expected to attend
- Training to be provided, to enable the volunteer to do the work properly
- Level and type of support to be provided
- Arrangements for appraisal
- Notice the organisation would like to have if the volunteer takes time off, and whom to notify
- What and how to claim reimbursement
- Relevant insurances provided by the organisation
- Whether the organisation will normally provide references for the volunteer
- The fact that the organisation and volunteer do not intend this arrangement to be legally binding

## 4: Expenses

Volunteers should not have to incur costs to volunteer for an organisation. It is good practice to offer to pay all volunteers out of pocket expenses for costs incurred while volunteering, otherwise some people will be prevented from volunteering.

However, apart from travel expenses, it is recommended that receipts etc are produced when volunteers are being reimbursed.

Expenses could be paid for the following:

- Travel
- Meals (usually if volunteering for over a minimum agreed period)
- Postage and telephone costs if working from home
- Protective clothing or essential equipment
- Costs of petrol used in the course of volunteering.

Organisations should only pay volunteers actual out of pocket expenses and not fixed amounts per session or lump sums. Paying more than actual out of pocket expenses can cause two main problems:

- Volunteers may need to check the position regarding Benefits and Income Tax if they are retired.
- It increases the possibility of volunteers being classed as employees.

## 5: Further Help

Dudley CVS Volunteer Centre  
7 Albion Street  
Brierley Hill  
DY5 3EE

Tel: 01384 267414  
Email: [volunteer@dudleycvs.org.uk](mailto:volunteer@dudleycvs.org.uk)

## Useful Websites

[www.dudleycvs.org.uk/volunteering.htm](http://www.dudleycvs.org.uk/volunteering.htm)

[www.volunteering.org.uk](http://www.volunteering.org.uk)

## Useful Publications

Dudley CVS Volunteer Centre has an extensive library of reference resources concerning all areas of Volunteer Management. To request a list of available resources, please contact the Volunteer Centre.

## FURTHER HELP

Dudley Council for Voluntary Service  
7 Albion Street  
Brierley Hill  
West Midlands  
DY5 3EE

 01384 573381

[www.dudleycvs.org.uk](http://www.dudleycvs.org.uk)